1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

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313
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placed on the outside of garden or hamlet-fences, to discourage hyenas, to keep livestock inside -- a natural barbed wire.

Eucalyptus tree ("bahĕr zaf") has become thoroughly rooted in Ethiopia. It is used in construction, especially of the more urban dwellings, as urban fuel, and its blue smoke and aroma is an early morning and evening feature of every town and market-town, where it is a major trade item. During the rainy season it grows so fast that a mature tree can be "harvested" 5 years after the nursling stage. Since it sells for $3-5 Ethiopian, (US $1-2) it is the most planted tree in Ethiopia today. The peasant also likes to use the odoriferous branches and leaves to cover the "dass" the festivity-shelter on marriages, etc., and the leafy branch as chera, flyswitch. Entire hillsides may be seen planted with this tree.

Female woods are also used for other indispensable products:

[386]

Ink - is made from the fruit of the "tämbälal" (Jasminum floribundum) tree, and its timer is used for the stock of the single-string violin, the masenqo. (But imported blue ink called "nil" is preferred by däbtära scribes.)

[534]

824
283

Fibre - for basketry, roof-hoops, etc. is obtained from the "wärqe" (musa ensete) (also called "enset") at lower altitudes, used especially for cords. Rope "gämäd" is made from the bark cut

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

282 over the "alga" bedstead.

Sheepskins ("debdeb") are used as upholstery over the solid clay bench that runs along the inside of the Amhara hut, as cover for the children at night, or to protect a mule from chafing by placing the sheepskin under [291] the saddle. Other sheepskins, "agoza" or "dabälo", are worn by church students too poor to own a good toga. Several skins make a coat for an adult itinerant monk and, formerly, for the warriors.

[415] Goatskins, when little-worked, are used for water carrying ("qärbäta") on travel, or to store butter in. [212] The bladder is made into a little bag. But goatskins carefully and at length scraped and tanned are made into parchment for amulets and books, especially psalteries for the church. These yellow-brown parchments ("beranna") with religious or warrior-king texts were rolled into a goatskin cover. Since contact with European missionaries in the mid-19th century, the custom has been to sew parchment pages together on one side with a twisted gut, bind the book in this fashion within two wooden covers covered with a red, tanned goatskin, on which a cross with even branches is impressed with a hot iron.

[531] In the same fashion scabbards of daggers are covered and ornamented with impressed, geometric lines. The tanned tailskin of a cow is used to cover a better walking stick, on which it gradually dries fast. [534] Drums for use in church (and formerly for royal proclamations) are made by tanned cowskins stretched over both ends of the wooden body. Finely tanned skins are used to cover the

293 story. Later ones imitate European crowns.
778 In parades tall crosses of bright metal are carried, Like most Abyssinian priestly hand crosses, they are so ornamented with further cross designs that they appear to the Abyssinian as "perforated"; hence the common expression "perforated as the cross" (where a Westerner would use the symbol of the sieve). Priests and monks always carry a handcross, which they hold out to a passing acquaintance to kiss, theproper greeting toward clergy, even on ordinary days. Smaller crosses are [789] used by the public as amulets against evil spirits. The larger crosses, with their ornamental supports, forming perforated circles and squares, sometimes contain engra- [325] ved verses. The method of casting is the"cire perdue", which is also used to cast the concave tops of the "ma- [534] qomya" crutch. In front of old churches, resonant stones are suspended from poles, and when struck, act as bells to summon for the service.

778 Other metal church utensils include the censers in which incense is burned during the services, swung by the officiating priest. They may be of brass, silver, iron, even clay in poorer churches. They are often equipped with numerous small bells. Very common is [534] the sistrum, called "sänassel" (onomatopoetic), a rattle instrument reminscent of ancient Egypt, usually of brass, 8 inches long, with a straight wooden handle, the metal frame cast in "cire perdue", often by Falasha smiths. The frame is perforated like a cross. The tinkling disks, [177] which glide along the cross-wire between the sides of the frame

778 the frame, are now often cut from modern tin cans.

The ceremonial drinking cup used in the eucharist is the "ṭewa", usually made of metal. But if used in the "mäḥabber" communal sodality outside the church, it is often of horn or clay, about 4½ inches high, 5 inches diameter at top, 1½ inches at bottom. On the latter occasion it is filled with barley beer or "berz" (honey-water). This is given the peasant at plowing time to [788] confer blessing upon him, thus called "maras baggo" (for spring plowing).

Other equipment belonging to the church may be a wooden pulpit for reading (not preaching), some tin [373] oil-lamps or the old wick-like candles (called "twāf"). 778 Very important are the drums, huge affairs carried by 534 the younger dancers during worship, suspended from shoulder straps. The barrel-like "nägarit", of which the average church has three (or must borrow them), usually has a height of at least 30 inches, a diameter of 15 inches. It is made of "wanza" wood (olive or other hardwood), with tanned oxhide moistened and stretched tightly across both ends. The drummer operates it with the flat of his fingers and top of flat palm. Another type is the "kabaro" drum, in which one end is bigger than the other. The drums and the swaying maqomya sticks keep time during the chanting. Trumpets are used only for parades, to herald the march, but not in accompaniment.

778 When not in use, most of these utensils are lock-
344 ed in a little treasure house, called "bētalehem" (in
251

796 While some of this feasting is now less orgiastic than in the past, "azmari" musicians still pass among the feasters, singing praises to the host and noble guests, [534] to the accompaniment of the single-string "masenqo" of male singers, and the banjo-like "qrar" fingered by women azmari. Torchlight parades, both of men and of women, leave the bonfire later, wind toward the nearest river or brook (still full though no longer raging) to enjoy the pleasure of bathing at its best, before the brooks dry to a trickle.

796 182 Thus the first church function of the year is an important factor in unifying this society: significant for all ages, both sexes, all classes; sets a time and place for rites of passage in the life cycle; renders visible paternalistic feudal patterns of human relationships; reopens the annual cycle of economic endeavors (caravans, weaving, etc.); reopens the pattern of kin visiting after the hibernation of 3 months; and reinforces the traditional religious as well as national values and attitudes.

796 In the months that follow there are several religious festivals, which also have social significance. Named after special saint's days, they vary from region to region.

The next widely observed holy day is Christmas, on the 29th day of the month of Tahsas. This does not nearly approach the significance it has in the Western 796 world, nor the Masqal feast just described. In fact, 526 Christmas, "Lədät" (lit. birthday) is more often refer-

533 resident Armenians, ranges from vague "oriental" melodies to European
178 melodies of the marching variety. But secular songs, grassroots folk-songs, are increasing with the use of public loudspeakers and growing up of a somewhat more modern educated generation singing love songs with less restraint than in the past, such as "yänne shega, yänne qonjo" (my peach, my beauty).

534 Musical instruments are largely divided into two categories in the mind of the Amhara; those used for the church service, notably percussion instruments; and those used for entertainment, notably string instruments, and wind instruments. Drums are used in both categories, however.

The reason percussion instruments predominate in church, is that musical instruments used in church have the role of marking time, in the chant-dances. Moreover, there is no independent instrumental music in the Abyssinian tradition, not even in organized entertainment.

Percussion instruments include the following:

Drum - "nägarit", the huge, barrel-like symmetrical drum over which skins are stretched at both ends, made to accompany rythmic (church) dances. It has a wooden body, 3' to 5' in length. It is considered the aristocratic drum, for in the past it was beaten to assemble the population for war or to hear a royal proclamation. (The modern government publication printing decrees is appropriately called "Nagarit Gazetta"). In the past it was carried on muleback in military expeditions, and preceded the entry of a governor into a province. Since it is heavy, it is suspended from a shoulder strap and carried by the younger men. It is beaten by the flat fingers and half the palm, while the drummer keeps time by swaying his upper body.

534 Kettledrum - "kəbäro", somewhat smaller drum, made of wooden bowl with a skin stretched over the mouth. It takes a variety of shapes, but unlike the nägarit it is not symmetrical, one end being smaller than the other. Sometimes it is a frame with beatable skins at both ends. It is used both in church and for less aristocratic occasions, such as entertainment dances, chants of warriors. Usually it fits into niches used as windows in church, or hangs under the overhanging roof of a private hut.

Sistrum - "sänasel" (onomatopoetic) resembles the ancient Egyptian variety. It is usually cast from brass through the cire perdue method. The sides are then perforated many times. Round, resonant metal discs glide on wires that connect the two sides. They are made of sheet metal, now often cut from tin cans. The grip is of brown or black wood. The whole instrument does not usually exceed 8".

Gongs - "däwäl", traditionally were of phonolithic stone suspended in front of churches, used as church bells to call to services. They are beaten with another rock or batter of iron, either called "yädäwäl mänčha". The Falashas, being ironsmiths, possess a flat iron disc almost a foot in diameter, which they suspend from a string from a finger, and beat with an iron spike, achieving a distinct gong sound.

String instruments used in public entertainment, include:

Lyre - "gerar" or "kerar", banjo-like, with 5 or 6 cords made of prepared goatgut (hence the name, from "karrara", stretched). It takes various forms and sometimes

resembles a guitar. It is the most common string instrument in Abyssinia. Some observers think it recalls the antique Mediterranean lyre. The sound chamber consists of a wooden basin (sometimes a castoff Italian pot), over which goatskin is stretched. This instrument is usually played by women, accompanying ballad-like love songs, etc. All the strings are struck at the same time, with a small, hard, thin, flat piece of leather, giving a harmonious sound. The instrument is used at weddings, or to attract customers to inns - for it is a "female instrument. It is also common in the Sudan.

Single-string violin, or "spike fiddle" - "masenqo". The sound chamber consists of a diamond-shaped wooden frame, over which a specially tanned goatskin ("mälägeniya qoda") is stretched tight. The wood is preferably from the jasmin tree ("tämbälal") (jasminum floribundum, the berries of which are used to make ink). The semicircular bow is spanned with black horsehair ("chera"), hence playing this instrument is called "chera tächawwätä", shortened to "cherawwata". Only males play the masenqo, usually male professional azmari, to accompany singing. At big feasts, as many as a dozen may play together. The music played on it is usually very high-pitched, accompanying female or male singers. Subject matter includes Songs to the Emperor, feudal war songs, etc. It is considered by the Amhara, more typically Amhara than the kerar. It actually does resemble the Arab "Rabab" (footnote 97).

Footnote 97 - Rohrer: Beiträge zur Materiellen Kultur der Amhara, 1932, p. 157.

534 Harp - "bäganna", has 10 to 12 cords, played with a soft stroke and special fiddlestick ("yäbägenna mämcha") of horny skin. It is reserved for rare and important occasions, when it is played before high clergy on religious occasions, or before royalty. Identified with King David, it is used to accompany spiritual and philosophical chants and laments. But in recent years it has been used more often in public entertainment in larger cities.

Wind instruments are not much used in organized fashion.

Fife - "washint", is a simple affair of bamboo, about 20 inches long, usually with four holes, producing as many tones. They are made and played by boys guarding cattle. The music has a bubbling quality that is believed to sound like running water, hence is attractive to the cattle and sheep. "Shämbaqo" bamboo is preferred. Sometimes an impromptu orchestra is formed by boys, when some bring drums to play in accompaniment.

Fife - "embilta", a larger, thicker fife of bamboo pipes, employing no stops, played by blowing strongly across a mouth hole (similar in principle to the Western pipe organ). Each pipe gives a single, true, tone, determined by its dimensions. Three or four different pipes are usually used together - though several blowers are then necessary. This creates a polyphony of high-pitched tones, very popular, used in accompanying chant-dances in public entertainment. It is widespread in the lowlands also, of Tigre and Eritrea.

Trumpet - "mälläkat" is relatively little used. Made of horn or wood, it blows long, solemn tones, used by cattle herders to call the flock, or, by an occasional rustic individual to lead

534 a cross-country church procession on a saint's day. But modern (leftover Italian) brass trumpets are replacing it for the latter use.

2. Play and Entertainment.

A. Games and Leisure-time Activities.

524 Games are differentiated largely on the basis of age: little boys' games are largely of a hazing type or of imitation of adult behavior; adolescents' games are predominantly competitive; adult games are largely leisure pastimes. In this adult-centered culture, children's games are at the same time freely experimental and directed toward growing up as fast as possible; while an adult would be ashamed to continue playing childish games or to compete with adolescents.

Small children, especially boys, are involved in hazing activities,

[865] "bedder", early in life. If they suffer a relapse into "Bedwetting", they are publicly shamed by the older children, and made to urinate publicly into a little trench. Small children are sometimes frightened by older ones with the bullroarer, ("gezzeta" - onomatopoetic), or by imitation of the sound of the hyena at night. Frequency of contact between older and younger children is especially prevalent during the "shut-in" rainy season. At this time, boys age 5 to 12 fight battles, sometimes using waterpistols ("tiqqosh") made of bamboo, with a wooden syringe. When the game gets rough ("entush") they knock each other down with knees (the seat of strength in Amhara opinion) and feet.

Boys of 8 or 9, who aspire to deaconhood at the next New Year holy days, are mock-examined by older boys who have achieved that status. The candidate must carry each of them several times around the churchyard, and must recite and chant liturgical prayers for them for hours. The candidate is punished for any disobediance by being pinched, tied up and otherwise abused.

Little girls play milder games, such as dancing rounds with other

524 and rock back and forth. This is largely a projection of human
831 activities, in their minds, for they have all seen actual sexual intercourse among domestic animals.

The puzzle of human sexual activities is reflected in boys' riddles:

Question: "On a precipice, two large gourds hang down, What are they?"

Reply: "Woman's breasts."

Question: "A little goatskin bottle, with mouth and fur.(What is it?)"

Reply: "Vulva ("ens").

Question: "In a porridge of sorghum, a potato expands?"

Reply: "Vulva and penis."

Question: "Hardwood that does not break, skin bottle that is not worn out?"

Reply: "Penis and vulva."

524 Since toys are almost never made for children, they must rely on
533 older children for any that they cannot make themselves, e.g. slingshots.

534 The aforementioned flute, "washint", is made by boys age 11 to 12, of a hollow light bamboo into which four holes are bored. The flute is blown into from the right corner of the mouth. The following sounds are distinguished:

a) to keep the cows calmly grazing: extended high-pitched sound (dadada dididi).

b) to keep away the leopard: lower-pitched sounds. (A variation is believed useful to attract the leopard to lure him into a covered pit, onto which the flute is then thrown).

c) to accompany the azmari singer, e.g. at a wedding: high-pitched sound in somewhat minor key, as in wooing chants, to suggest emotion.

d) to accompany the "hotu" jump-dance, eg. on holy days as Temqat: a hacked, staccato sound is produced (dada dodo dada).

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

346 very well closed; all appears to be vaulted. The church has a chancel and a transept, in the centre transept are curtains from end to end; and there are other curtains before the side doors, from wall to wall. They are curtains of silk: the entrance through these curtains is in three places, they are open in the middle, and they reach one to another, also they can be entered close to the walls. In the said three entrances there are little bells suspended to the curtains themselves, and nobody can enter by any part without these bells ringing. Here there is not more than one altar, which is in the chancel: this has a stand on four props, and the altar reaches to these four props. This stand is covered over above as though with a vault, and there is an altar stone which they call *tabuto*. Upon this altar stone there is a basin of copper, very large and flat below, and with low sides. This basin also reaches to the supports of the stand, which are disposed in a square. Within this large basin there is another smaller one. This stand has curtains hanging down from it to the ground, that is, at the back and sides, which screen the altar, except that in front it is open. One can go all round the altar. The bells are of
534 stone, and in this manner: long thin stones, suspended by cords passed through them, and they strike them with sticks made for the purpose, and they make a sound as of cracked bells heard at a distance. Also at festivals they take the basins from the altar and strike them with sticks, and they help to make a sound. They have also other iron bells, not round, but with two sides, they have a clapper which strikes first on one side and then on the other, and it makes a noise as of helving a mattock. They also have other small ill-made bells, which they carry in their hands at processions, and they ring the whole of them at the festivals. On other days the bells of stones and iron are
182 used. In all churches and monasteries they ring for matins
796 two hours before dawn. They say the prayers by heart and

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

another lord, who was named Adiby, who was now Barnagais. Beneath the Barnagais are some great lords whom they call Xuums, which means captains; and these are, first, Xuum Cire, a very great captaincy, he is now married to a sister of Prester John. We never went to this country and Xuumeta because it is distant and out of the way. There is another Xuumeta named Ceruil. We knew this lordship, and they say that its Xuum brings into the field fifteen thousand spearmen with shields and archers. Also Xuum Cama, and Buno Xuum, and Xuum bono. These Xumetas had been one, and on account of its being large, and the Prester having misgivings that they might set themselves up against the Barnagais, he made it into two, and even yet each of them is very large. They say that this lordship which is now two was the dominion of Queen Candace, without having been larger in her time. She was the first Christian that there was in this country, and whom the Lord called powerful. Also two other captaincies, one is named Dafilla, the other Canfila; these two border on Egypt, and their captains are like lords of the marches. All these captains before mentioned are of kettledrums, which nobody except great lords can carry: and all these serve with the Barnagais in wars when he goes to them, and wherever he may go. They have other great gentlemen under their command who are called Arraz,[1] which means heads. We knew one of these, who was named Arraz Aderaan, he is head over fifteen thousand men at arms, whom they name chavas. I saw this Arraz Aderaan twice at the court, both times I saw him before the gate of the Prester John going without a shirt, and from his waist downwards a very good silk cloth, and on his shoulders the skin of a lion, in his right hand a spear, and in his left hand a shield. I asked how it was so great a lord went about in that manner, they told me that the greatest honour

643 631 643 701 631 [534] [292] [411]

[1] *Ar-ras.*

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

784 He says that during all Passion week they are dressed in black or blue, and do not speak to one another for grief, saying that Judas by a kiss of peace betrayed his Lord.

532 784 Although there are in the churches effigies painted on all the walls, and also crosses, nevertheless on no cross is a crucifix painted, neither have they any of solid carving; because they say they are not deserving to see Christ crucified.

792 778 All the priests, friars, and gentlemen carry crosses in their hands, both on foot and on horseback; and the laymen of the people and lower people carry crosses round their necks. Every priest and friar carries a little horn of copper with holy water, and the hosts where they arrive beg of them water and a blessing, and they give it. Before they eat they throw drops of water on the food, and also in the drinking vases.

411 Their arms are assagays, few swords, a few shirts of mail, long and narrow; our Portuguese say that they are not of good mail.

There are many bows and arrows, they have no feathers like ours; there are very few helmets and casques. Those that there are have come since they have had intercourse with the Portuguese. There are plenty of strong bucklers;

713 there are no cannon, except two swivel guns which we brought them. At our departure there were fourteen muskets at Court, which they bought from the Turks who come there to trade. The Prester ordered whatever they asked to be given for them, and ordered men to be taught to shoot.

534 There are trumpets, but not good ones; there are many drums of copper which come from Cairo, and others of wood which have leather on both sides; there are tambourines like ours, and large cymbals which they sound. There are flutes and some instruments with chords, square like harps, which they call David moçanquo, which means the harp of David. They play these to the Prester, and not well.

E: Rev G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

the eye. Its beauty was not increased by the addition of a corrugated iron annexe for the purpose of seating some of the foreign guests at the Emperor's coronation.

The Abouna was good enough to arrange for us to visit the church, and we were received with ceremony by a number of priests, who were exceedingly kind and enabled us to make a thorough inspection, and even allowed us to take some photographs (which unfortunately, owing to the bad light, did not come out). They showed us everything with great enthusiasm and begged us to return "when a great feast was in progress". The building consists of three portions, a sort of outer gallery, an inner court, and finally the Holy Place or Holy of Holies, an inner chamber in the centre of the building in which rests the *Tabot* or representative of the Ark of the Covenant to which only the priests are allowed access.

The priests threw open the doors of the Holy Place for us to see in; it contained a kind of altar where the Sacraments are kept, and was surrounded by priests in very gorgeous vestments, burning incense and holding big crosses and crucifixes.

In one of the galleries a service was proceeding. Two priests were beating with their hands very big drums made of wood and hide; many others were shaking their curious little brass cymbals; and all were chanting, swaying their bodies, and slowly waving their praying-sticks. The time was really good, and the chant was rhythmic and tuneful, and not at all unmelodious.

The galleries were profusely decorated with huge life-size paintings depicting mainly scenes from the Scriptures, scenes from the life of Christ, the miracles, etc.; one dreadfully realistic picture of the Massacre

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5

ments, whilst their shaggy little ponies curveted and plunged like mad things.

Dressed in his magnificent Abyssinian robes, carrying a modern rifle, and mounted on a wonderfully caparisoned black mule, Ras Tafari rode slowly up to the tent and took his seat on the throne surrounded by hundreds of gorgeously clad notables, and facing what was perhaps the most striking contingent of all, the priests, ranged on three sides of a square in front of the throne. Those on the opposite side of the square were all in white; those on the right and left wore robes of such dazzling colouring that in the sun's bright rays it almost hurt one's eyes to look at them. Red, blue, green, orange, purple, every imaginable colour, thickly covered with heavy gold and silver embroideries, and gold ornaments and head-dresses. And as if this orgy of colour were not enough, servants held scores of gaudy coloured gold-embroidered and much befringed and tasselled umbrellas over them.

Many of the priests carried magnificent crosses of gold and silver, others their long silver or ivory-handled praying-sticks, whilst some held various musical bell-like instruments, and about half a dozen managed large drums—things about three feet high made of silver with copper bands. Particularly striking were the dresses of ten young boys bearing golden crowns, symbolical of the ten commandments; while the *Tabots* brought from the neighbouring churches were very gorgeously bedecked. It was a wonderful and barbaric sight.

And then the Dance of the Priests began. Low chanting without music at first, followed by slow graceful movements of all their hundreds of arms in fine

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

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FIG. 16.—*The procession on Timqat Day*

142
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FIG. 17.—*Timqat procession: detail*

[P. 110-A]

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

565 554 The local nobility, on the other hand, were eminences whose lives and reputations were bound to a more circumscribed locale. While the non-royal nobility, or *maḳuānnent* in the stricter sense, performed as high dignitaries at the imperial court and governors of large provinces, the local nobility were district chiefs and judges, or even simply wealthy landowners, who enjoyed considerable deference. Though they might not be known outside of their home regions, these men were, for the mass of the population, the lords of existence. *Ka-Gondar negus / yāgar āmbārās,* "the petty district chief [is obeyed] more than the Gondar king"[19] expresses folk wisdom on the subject. The Amharic terms which designate this class of men are *bālābbāt* and *shum,* terms we shall want to consider more closely below.

565 184 Despite these distinctions among members of the upper stratum of Abyssinian society, with respect to their general orientation and style of life they differed only in degree. They created and shared what might be called a "gentry subculture," even though it was not so differentiated from the general culture as was the case in Europe and China. In the present context, it will be meaningful to treat them as a single status group.

565 184 86 [576] Special manners and skills were self-consciously taught to children of the *maḳuānnent,* most of which remain part of the gentry subculture today. An etiquette of instinctual inhibition is taught. Some attention is given, for example, to toilet training, which is spontaneous among peasant children. Spitting in public is proscribed. Physical aggression is discouraged in favor of the more subtle forms of satire and patient manipulation of others. A quiet, reserved manner of speaking is stressed, in contrast with the less inhibited and cruder self-expression of the peasantry. Dignity of comportment is expected at all times; a noble should not, for example, express great enthusiasm or surprise over anything. Sobriety is inculcated as a virtue; alcohol is *la-çhawā lījj* [293] *mādasetchā / la-bālagē māzabābatchā* ("for the nobleman's son a stimulant, for the commoner an intoxicant"). In short, the gentry subculture stresses the general ideal of bringing a child up to be conspicuously genteel, or *çhawā.*

565 184 868 [871] [534] [883] Sons of the nobility have traditionally followed a privileged curriculum.[20] They were given lessons in horseback riding and weaponry at an early age. They were also taught how to swim, an uncommon skill among the Abyssinians. Reading would often be taught, for which schooling a man of the church might be brought in as a tutor, or the boy might be sent for a while to a monastery. He might also learn how to play the *baganā,* the ten-stringed lyre used to accompany certain forms of religious and plaintive secular songs. Instead of spending his teen-age years at the plow, which was regarded as beneath his dignity, the noble boy would follow his father to court and observe the ways of litigation and the manner of passing judgments; or he might be sent as a page to the court of the king or some great lord.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

who cultivated them being required to hand over a certain proportion of their produce every year.*

A man's "bigness," however, depended more on political authority than possession of land. It was often true in Abyssinia, as in feudal France, that the most powerful lords actually possessed relatively few estates. So long as they were not out of favor, the nobility typically were given appointments as provincial and regional governors in return for their loyalty and services.

The responsibilities of governors at all levels were diffuse. As with the emperor, combined in their persons were administrative, judicial, and ceremonial, as well as military, functions. They were obliged to collect the land tax and tithes of their subjects and transmit the proper amount to the king. They communicated imperial proclamations, announced by beating the *nagārit*, a large drum which symbolized the legitimacy of their authority. They had to judge cases of litigation that originated in their court or were appealed from lower levels. They were expected to keep disturbances caused by bandits in their area down to a reasonable minimum. They had to preside informally on the occasion of religious festivals and to provide large feasts for their followers, and occasionally for the beggars and indigents of the area.

The fact that political position was granted as a reward for military activity, like so many acres of land—or to the highest bidder, as Almeida complained[29]—suggests that the benefits of office outweighed its obligations. Indeed, public authority in Ethiopia was frankly regarded as a private possession by all concerned. The incumbent might change, but the office remained—not so much a set of obligations to fulfill in behalf of the king, or the state, let alone in behalf of the subjects—but a set of opportunities for personal aggrandizement.

The opportunities, both psychic and economic, were impressive. One was expected to avail himself of all the obsequious gestures which serve to swell the ego of an Abyssinian ruler. If so inclined, the governor could indulge his sadism ad libitum; sword, lash, and rope were, besides the *nagārit* and seal, the official insignia of a provincial ruler. He could order the peasants in his area to labor for him—to plow his lands or build his houses—as well as command them to military service. He could exact tribute from them without relief, in addition to appropriating for his family and retainers part of the

* Each land unit worked by a given tenant farmer, or *gabbār*, would be divided according to that proportion, in order to equalize the differences resulting from variation in such factors as the size of land units or the quality of soil. The proportion paid to the landlord varied with the location of the land; thus, one-half might be exacted for ordinary *dēgā* (high) land, while in certain *qolâ* (low) areas only a tenth might be required, owing to the difficulties of heat, jungle, and wild beasts.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

142
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534

[P.174-8]

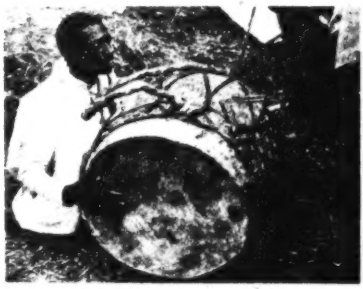

FIG. 27.—*A deacon*

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FIG. 28.—*Group of* dabtarā

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FIG. 29.—*An old priest*

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*121 538 156 [526] sinuate insults through the ambiguities of his compliments, as was illustrated above. *Shillalā*, declaimed to arouse male courage before battle, is also heard at weddings and other festive occasions. Another type of exclamatory verse (*ho-berē*) is sung by the peasant at harvest time as he drives his cattle around the threshing floor. Verse of sorrow (*engurguro*) is intoned at time of bereavement or during moments of loneliness. Finally, in the conviviality of a drink-house enlivened by a minstrel, alone at work, or with a group of friends on various occasions, the Amhara finds that verse provides a medium for thoughts on almost any subject—people, places, animals, weather, love, work, and death. The following poem illustrates an important quality found in many of these verses, pessimism and irony, especially common in verses about love.

[539] Fish on the cliff, baboons in the sea;
The ass after honey, while hay draws the bee;
On a baking-pan of wax, butter to see;
Or a monk from Zegamel monastery
In the pagan land of Metcha to bury;
With an unsuited person in love to be;
Thus has it ended, my affair with thee.
Leave it, forget it, just let it rest—
A hapless ass at a hyena's breast.

[533] [534] These various sorts of verse may be either sung or spoken. The auditory effect is often enhanced by the accompaniment of musical instruments. When serious *qenē* has been recited by its author in church, it is usually repeated by a chorus of *dabtarā* singing to the slow beat of drums and sistrums. The sad strains of *engurgo* are sometimes accompanied by the mellow ten-stringed lyre, while an instrumental background for livelier subjects may be provided by the Abyssinian banjo or one-stringed violin.

Throughout these varieties of verse forms, certain conventions are followed. Most important, the lines are supposed to rhyme; that is, end with the same consonant-plus-vowel. Inferior poets achieve this rhyme at the expense of the words they use. In addition, proper rhythm must be maintained; the lines must not "break." This means that the flow of the line must be smooth and that the metrical pattern in one line—based on the number of accents, not syllables[34]—should be paralleled by the others. A poet who breaks his lines is satirized by being dubbed a "lion."

While observing these rules—and, in the case of *qenē*, the much more complicated rules pertaining to stanza forms and poetic figures—the Amhara poet *must also be original*. In the production of verse, individuality is explicitly emphasized. Poets who use verses composed by others—this is primarily true of students of *qenē*—are insulted with the term *lēbā* ("thief"). Similarly, a poet should not repeat himself. If he repeats the same word